THE BOOK OF SPELLS

Once upon a time... in the middle of a forest round whose edges lay scattered some peasants cottages, an ogre used to live. He was big, cruel and heartless, but he liked his house be tidy. So he said to himself,

"I'm always out hunting, fishing and causing trouble. I need somebody to look after the house, clean the floors, wash the plates and do the laundry every week..." Out he went and crouched down near one of the cottages, belonging to certain poor peasants.

When he saw their children come out, a boy and a girl, he streched out his big hand, grabbed them and carried them away.

"You'll be my servants," he said, "and I will give you your food. But if you try to run away, you will be the next dish!" Terrified, the two children agreed, and they lived in the ogre's house for a long time. Then, they noticed that, every evening, the ogre pulled out a large book, which he would read carefully... it was the Book of Spells! The two children, who were intelligent, read the book when the ogre was away, and they too learned the magic spells. At last, the boy said,

"Sister, I think I know enough now! Come on, let's run away!"

"Oh! Are you sure you know how to cast spells?" asked the girl anxiously.

"Of course!" said he. "Come on, before the ogre gets back!" So the pair ran out of the house into the forest. Suddenly, the girl cried out,

"I can hear somebody running! The ogre's following us!" The ogre was determined to catch the pair and, without a doubt, with his long legs, he would soon catch up on them.

So the young lad cast the first of the spells.He turned himself into a pound and his sister into a minnow! A moment later, the ogre rushed up, saw what had taken place and growled:

"If only I had a line! I'll run and fetch one!" and off he went. The two children turned back into their normal selves and started to flee once more. But the ogre was soon on their heels and he was just about to lay hands on them, when the boy cast the second spell. He turned himself into a shrine and his sister into an angel painted on the wall. The ogre would have loved to kick the shrine to bits, but he didn't dare. He shouted,

"I'll burn you down instead!" and ran to fetch a bundle of wood.

In the meantime, however, the children were off again. They ran and ran,

till they were exhausted and out of breath... And on the point of being snatched... the boy, working a third spell, turned himself and his sister into grains of corn, that mingled with thousands and thousands of other grains on the threshing floor... The ogre exclaimed:

"You think you can beat me with my own spells, but I'm far more cunning than you!" and he turned into a cockerel that hurriedly began to peck all the grains. What awful danger. But a second before being pecked, the boy turned into a fox, pounced on the cockerel and gobbled him up!

And now that the ogre was gone, the boy and his sister were able to go home again, safe and sound!

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